

Warning Concerning Copyright Restrictions

The Copyright Law of the United States (**Title 17, United States Code**) governs the making of photocopies or other reproductions of copyrighted materials. Under certain conditions specified in the law, libraries and archives are authorized to furnish a photocopy or other reproduction. One of these specified conditions is that the photocopy or reproduction is not to be used for any purpose other than private study, scholarship, or research. If electronic transmission of reserve material is used for purposes in excess of what constitutes "fair use," that user may be liable for copyright infringement.

Disowning Knowledge
In Six Plays of Shakespeare

STANLEY CAVELL



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

6

Recounting Gains, Showing Losses
 Reading *The Winter's Tale*

A PART FROM any more general indebtedness of the romantics to Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale* is particularly apt in relation to their themes of reawakening or revival, as for example entering into the figure of the six-year-old boy of Wordsworth's *Intimations* ode and the ode's idea of the adult's world as "remains," as of corpses. I associate this figure, especially in view of his difficulties over remembering, with Freud's report of a phobia in a five-year-old boy, partly simply to commemorate Freud's acknowledgment that he was preceded in his perceptions by the poets, more specifically because of Freud's consequent perception in this case of adult human life struggling toward happiness from within its own "debris." Now here at the end of *The Winter's Tale* a dead five- or six-year-old boy remains unaccounted for.

Or is this prejudicial? Shall we say that the absent boy is meant to cast the shadow of finitude or doubt over the general air of reunion at the end of the play, to emblemize that no human reconciliation is uncompromised, not even one constructible by the powers of Shakespeare? Or shall we say that in acquiring a son-in-law the loss of the son is made up for? Would that be Hermione's – the son's mother's – view of the matter? Or shall we take the boy's death more simply symbolically, as standing for the inevitable loss of childhood? Then does Perdita's being found mean that there is a way in which childhood *can*, after all, be recovered? But the sixteen years that Perdita was, as it were, lost are not recovered. Time may present itself as a good-humored old man, but what he speaks about in his appearance as Chorus in this play is his lapse, his being spent, as if behind our backs. Then is the moral that we

Disowning Knowledge

all require forgiveness and that forgiveness is always a miracle, taking time but beyond time? Any of these things can be said, but how can we establish or deliver the weight or gravity of any such answer?

Why did the boy die? The boy's father, Leontes, says on one occasion that the boy is languishing from

nobleness!
Conceiving the dishonor of his mother,
He straight declined, drooped, took it deeply,
Fastened, and fixed the shame on't in himself.
(II, iii, 11-14)

But this sounds more like something Leontes himself has done, and so suggests an identification Leontes has projected between himself and his son. The lines at the same time project an identification with his wife, to the extent that one permits "conceiving" in that occurrence to carry on the play's ideas of pregnancy, given the line's emphasis on drooping, as under a weight. But I am getting ahead of my story. The servant who brings the report of Mamillius's death attributes it to anxiety over his mother's plight. But the timing of the play suggests something else. Mamillius disappears from our sight for good when he is ordered by his enraged father to be separated from his mother. "Bear the boy hence, he shall not come about her" (II, i, 59). And theatrically, or visually, the father's rage had immediately entered, as if it was brought on, with Mamillius sitting on his mother's lap and whispering in her ear. What the boy and his mother interpret themselves to be doing is telling and listening to a winter's tale. What Leontes interprets them to be doing we must surmise from two facts: first, that both mother and son have got into this intimate position as a result of mutually seductive gestures, however well within the bounds, for all we know, of normal mental and sexual growth; second, that the idea of whispering has already twice been hit upon by Leontes' mind as it dashes into madness, once when it imagines people are gossiping about his cuckoldry, again as it cites evidence for the cuckoldry to the courtier Camillo in the astounding speech that begins "Is whispering nothing?" (I, ii, 284).

Naturally I shall not claim to know that Leontes imagines the son to be repeating such rumors to his mother, to the effect that

he is not the son of, as it were, his own father. We are by now so accustomed to understanding insistence or protestation, perhaps in the form of rage, as modes of denial, that we will at least consider that the *negation* of this tale is the object of Leontes' fear, namely the fear that he *is* the father. As if whatever the son says, the very power of his speaking, of what it is he bespeaks, is fearful; as if his very existence is what perplexes his father's mind.

Why would the father fear being the true father of his children? One reason might be some problem of his with the idea that he has impregnated the mother, I mean of course the *son's* mother. Another might be that this would displace him in this mother's affection, and moreover that he would himself have to nurture that displacement. Another might be that this would ratify the displacement of his and his friend Polixenes' mutual love, his original separation from whom, which means the passing of youth and innocence, was marked, as Polixenes tells Hermione, by the appearance of the women they married. But for whatever reason, the idea of his fearing to be a father would make his jealousy of Polixenes suspicious – not merely because it makes the jealousy empirically baseless, but because it makes it psychologically derivative. This is worth saying because there are views that would take the jealousy between brothers as a rock-bottom level of human motivation. In taking it as derivative I do not have to deny that Leontes is jealous of Polixenes, only to leave open what this means, and how special a human relation it proposes.

To further the thought that disowning his issue is more fundamental than, or causes, his jealousy of his friend and brother, rather than the other way around, let us ask how what is called Leontes' "diseased opinion" (I, ii, 297) drops its disease.

It vanishes exactly upon his learning that his son is dead. The sequence is this: Leontes refuses the truth of Apollo's oracle; a servant enters, crying for the king. Leontes asks, "What's the business?" and is told the prince is gone. Leontes questions the word and is told it means "Is dead." Leontes' response at once is to relent: "Apollo's angry, and the heavens themselves / Do strike at my injustice"; whereupon Hermione faints. Of course you can say that the consequences of Leontes' folly have just built up too far for him to bear them any further and that he is shocked into the truth. This is in a general way undeniable, but it hardly suggests why it is *here* that he buckles, lets himself feel the shock. It is not psycho-

Disowning Knowledge

logically forced to imagine that he first extend his assertion of Mamillius's drooping from shame and accuse Hermione of Mamillius's murder, or at least that Shakespeare follow his primary source, the tale of jealousy as told in Robert Greene's romance *Pandosto*, and let Leontes immediately believe the oracle, but still too late; so that news of his son's death and of Hermione's death upon that news comes during his recantation, as double punishment for his refusal of belief. Or again, Shakespeare could have persisted in his idea that Leontes believes the oracle only after he sees that his disbelief has killed, and still have preserved the idea of the shock as the death of both his son and his wife. But the choice of *The Winter's Tale* is, rather, to make the cure perfectly coincide with the death of the son alone. How do we understand Shakespeare's reordering, or recounting?

Think of the boy whispering in his mother's ear, and think back to her having shown that her fantasy of having things told in her ear makes her feel full (I, ii, 91-2); that is, that her pregnancy itself is a cause of heightened erotic feeling in her (something that feeds her husband's confusion and strategy). Then the scene of the boy's telling a tale is explicitly one to cause jealousy (as accordingly was the earlier scene of telling between Hermione and Polixenes, which the present scene repeats, to Leontes' mind); hence the son's death reads like the satisfaction of the father's wish. The further implication is that Apollo is angry not, or not merely, because Leontes does not believe his oracle, but because the god has been outsmarted by Leontes, or rather by his theater of jealousy, tricked into taking Leontes' revenge *for* him, as if himself punished for believing that even a god could halt the progress of jealousy by a deliverance of reason. (Leontes' intimacy with riddles and prophecies would then not be his ability to solve them, but to anticipate them.)

Then look again at the "rest," the relief from restlessness of his brain, that Leontes has achieved at this stage of death and fainting. He says, as he asks Paulina and the ladies in attendance to remove and care for the stricken Hermione, "I have too much believed mine own suspicion" (III, ii, 148) — a fully suspicious statement, I mean one said from *within* his suspicion, not from having put it aside. The statement merely expresses his regret that he *believed* his suspicion too much. How much would have been just enough? And what would prevent this excess of belief in the future? The situation

Counting and Recounting

remains unstable. How could it not, given what we know of the condition from which he requires recovery?

He had described the condition in the following way, in the course of his speech upon discovering the mother and the son together:

There may be in the cup
A spider steeped, and one may drink, depart,
And yet partake no venom, for his knowledge
Is not infected; but if one present
Th'abhorred ingredient to his eye, make known
How he hath drunk, he cracks his gorge, his sides,
With violent hefts. I have drunk, and seen the spider.

(II, i, 39-45)

Of the fabulous significance in these lines, I note here just the skeptic's sense, as for example voiced by David Hume, of being cursed, or sickened, in knowing more than his fellows about the fact of knowing itself, in having somehow peeked behind the scenes, or, say, conditions, of knowing. (Though what Shakespeare is revealing those conditions to be is something Hume, or Descartes, would doubtless have been astonished to learn.) And Leontes has manifested the collapse of the power of human knowing in the "Is whispering nothing?" speech, which ends:

Why, then the world and all that's in't is nothing,
The covering sky is nothing, Bohemia nothing,
My wife is nothing, nor nothing have these nothings,
If this be nothing.

(I, ii, 293-6)

Chaos seems to have come again; and what chaos looks like is the inability to say what exists; to say whether, so to speak, language applies to anything.

These experiences of Leontes go rather beyond anything I find I might mean by speaking of believing my suspicions too much. So far I am suggesting merely that this insufficiency of recovery is what you would expect in tracking Leontes' progress by means of the map of skepticism. For here is where you discover the *precipitousness* of the move from next to nothing (say from the merest

Disowning Knowledge

surmise that one may be dreaming, a repeated surmise in Leontes' case) into nothingness. Hume recovers from his knowledge of knowledge, or, let me say, learns to live with it, but what he calls its "malady" is never cured; and Descartes recovers only by depending (in a way I judge is no longer natural to the human spiritual repertory) on his detailed dependence on God. I assume it is unclear to what extent we have devised for ourselves late versions of these reparations. If *The Winter's Tale* is understandable as a study of skepticism – that is, as a response to what skepticism is a response to – then its second half must be understandable as a study of its search for recovery (after Leontes, for example, and before him Othello, have done their worst). That skepticism demands – Cartesian skepticism, Humian skepticism, the thing Kant calls a scandal to philosophy – efforts at recovery is internal to it: It is inherently unstable; no one simply wants to be a (this kind of) skeptic. Skepticism's own sense of what recovery would consist in dictates efforts to refute it; yet refutation can only extend it, as Othello notably found out. True recovery lies in reconceiving it, in finding skepticism's source (its origin, say, if you can say it without supposing its origin is past).

To orient ourselves in finding how *The Winter's Tale* conceives of this search for recovery, let us question its title further. Several passages in the play are called tales or said to be like tales, but the only thing said to be a tale for winter is the tale begun by the boy Mamillius. I have heard it said, as if it is accepted wisdom, that the remainder of the play, after we no longer hear what Mamillius says, or would have said, is the play as it unfolds. Supposing so, what would the point be? According to what I have so far found to be true of that narration, what we are given are events motivated by seduction, told in a whisper, having the effect of drawing on the vengeance of a husband and father who, therefore, has interpreted the tale as revealing something about him, and specifically something to do with the fact that his wife has or has not been faithful to him, where her faithfulness would be at least as bad as her faithlessness would be. (This is the match of my way of looking at *Othello*.) Although I find these to be promising lines to follow out as characteristics of our play, they will any of them depend on some working sense of why a play is being called a tale. Is it simply that the play is about a tale, or the telling of a tale, as for instance the film *The Philadelphia Story* is, in a sense, about a magazine story,

Counting and Recounting

or the getting and the suppressing of a story? Does it matter that we do not know what the tale is that the play would on this account be about? Three times an assertion is said to sound like an old tale – that the king's daughter is found, that Antigonus was torn to pieces by a bear, and that Hermione is living – and each time the purpose is to say that one will have trouble believing these things without seeing them, that the experience of them “lames report,” “undoes description,” and lies beyond the capacity of “ballad-makers . . . to express it” (V, ii, 61–2, 26–7). It is uncontroversial that Shakespeare's late plays intensify his recurrent study of theater, so we may take it that he is here asserting the competition of poetic theater with nontheatrical romance as modes of narrative, and especially claiming the superiority of theater (over a work like his own “source” *Pandosto*) in securing full faith and credit in fiction. But what are the stakes in such a competition, if they go beyond the jealousies of one profession or craft toward another? Let us consider that Leontes' interruption of Mamillius's tale itself suggests a competition over the question *whose* tale the ensuing tale is, the son's or the father's, or somehow both, the one told in whispers and beckonings, under the voice, the other, at the same time, at the top of the voice, in commands and accusations.

While evidently I expect considerable agreement that in Leontes' intrusion we have an Oedipal conflict put before us, I am not assuming that we thereupon know how to work our way through the conflict. Freud, I guess like Sophocles, seems to look at the conflict as initiated by the son's wish to remove or replace the father, whereas in *The Winter's Tale* the conflict, on the contrary, seems primarily generated by the father's wish to replace or remove the son. Perhaps this speaks of a difference between tragedy and romance – hence of their inner union – but in any case I do not wish to prejudice such a matter.

Let us for the moment separate two of the play's primary regions of ideas that intersect in Mamillius's whispering of a tale of generation, namely ideas concerning telling or relating and ideas concerning breeding and issue. These are the ideas I shall follow out here to the extent I can, and from which I derive the point of calling the play a tale, something told. To grasp initially how vast these regions are, consider that telling in the play belongs to its theme not alone of relating or recounting, but to its theme of counting generally, hence to its preoccupation with computation and business

Disowning Knowledge

and the exchange of money. And consider that the theme of breeding or branching or issue or generation belongs to the play's themes of dividing or separation.

The regions may be seen as the poles of opposite faces of a world of partings, of parting's dual valence, as suggested in the paired ideas of participation and of parturition, or in other words of the play, ideas of being fellow to and of dissevering. The play punctuates its language with literal "part" words, as if words to the wise, words such as depart, parting, departure, apart, party to, partner, and, of course, bearing a part. That last phrase, saying that parts are being born, itself suggests the level at which theater (here in a phrase from music) is being investigated in this play; hence suggests why theater is for Shakespeare an *endless* subject of study; and we are notified that no formulation of the ideas of participation and parturition in this play will be complete that fails to account for their connection with theatrical parts; or, put otherwise, to say why tales of parting produce plays of revenge, sometimes of revenge over-come.

Since the region of telling and counting (think of it as *relating*; I am naming it participation) is so ramified, and may yet remain incompletely realized, let me remind you of its range. Reading *The Winter's Tale* to study it, to find out my interest in it, was the second time in my literary experience in which I have felt engulfed by economic terms; I mean felt a text engulfed by them. The first time was in studying *Walden*, another work insistently about pastoral matters and the vanishing of worlds. In *The Winter's Tale* – beyond the terms tell and count themselves, and beyond account and loss and lost and gain and pay and owe and debt and repay – we have money, coin, treasure, purchase, cheat, custom, commodity, exchange, dolc, wages, recompense, labor, affairs, traffic, tradesmen, borrow, save, credit, redeem, and – perhaps the most frequently repeated economic term in the play – business. But the sheer number of such terms will not convey the dense saturation of the language of this play – perhaps, it may seem, of language as such, or some perspective toward language, or projection of it – in this realm of terms; not even the occurrence within this realm of what one may take as the dominating thematic exchanges of the action, from suffering loss to being redeemed to paying back and getting even; the saturation seems more deeply expressed by the interweavings of the words and the scope of contexts – or, let us say, interests –

over which they range. If one seeks an initial guess for this saturation or shadowing of language by the economic, or the computational, one might say that it has to do with the thought that the very purpose of language is to communicate, to inform, which is to say, to tell.

And you always tell more and tell less than you know. Wittgenstein's *Investigations* draws this most human predicament into philosophy, forever returning to philosophy's ambivalence, let me call it, as between wanting to tell more than words can say and wanting to evade telling altogether – an ambivalence epitomized in the idea of wishing to speak “outside language games,” a wish for (language to do, the mind to be) everything and nothing. Here I think again of Emerson's wonderful saying in which he detects the breath of virtue and vice that our character “emits” at every moment, words so to speak always before and beyond themselves, essentially and unpredictably recurrent, say rhythmic, fuller of meaning than can be exhausted. So that it may almost be said of every word and phrase in the language what William Empson has said of metaphors, that they are pregnant (or are they, or at the same time, seminal?).

I was speaking of the thought that the very purpose of language, it may be said, is to tell. It is therefore hardly surprising, as it were, that an answer to the question “How do you know?” is provided by specifying how you can tell, and in two modes. Asked how you know there is a goldfinch in the garden you may, for example, note some feature of the goldfinch, such as its eye markings or the color of its head; or you may explain how you are in a position to know, what your credentials are, or whether someone told you. (I mean this example, I hope it is clear, in homage to J. L. Austin's unendingly useful study “Other Minds.”) In the former case you begin a narrative of the object's differences from other relevant objects; in the latter case a narrative of differences in your position from other positions. (From such trivial cases one may glimpse the following speculation arising: If a narrative is something told, and telling is an answer to a claim to knowledge, then perhaps any narrative, however elaborated, may be understood as an answer to some implied question of knowledge, perhaps in the form of some disclaiming of knowledge or avoidance of it.)

But there is another route of answer to the question how you know (still confining our attention to what is called empirical

Disowning Knowledge

knowledge), namely a claim to have experienced the thing, most particularly in the history of epistemology, to have seen it. This answer, as it occurs in classical investigations of human knowledge, is more fundamental than, or undercuts, the answers that consist of telling. What makes it more fundamental is suggested by two considerations. First, to claim to have seen is to claim, as it were, to have seen for oneself, to put one's general capacity as a knower on the line; whereas one does not claim to tell by the eye markings for oneself, but for anyone interested in such information. Hence what is at stake here is just a more or less specialized piece of expertise, which may for obvious reasons be lacking or in obvious ways need improvement. Second, knowing by telling, as suggested, goes by differences, say by citing identifying marks or features of a thing: You can for instance tell a goldfinch from a goldcrest because of their differences in eye markings. Whereas knowing by seeing does not require, and cannot employ, differences. (Unless the issue is one of difference in the mode or nature of seeing itself, call this the aesthetics of seeing. Epistemology is obliged to keep aesthetics under control, as if to guard against the thought that there is something more [and better] seeing can be, or provide, than evidence for claims to know, especially claims that particular objects exist.) You cannot tell (under ordinary circumstances; a proviso to be determined) – it makes no clear sense to speak of telling – a goldfinch from a peacock, or either from a telephone, or any from a phone call. To know a hawk from a handsaw – or a table from a chair – you simply have, as it were, to be able to say what is before your eyes; it would be suggestive of a lack (not of expertise but) of mental competence (for example suggestive of madness) to confuse one with the other. As if the problem of knowledge is now solely how it is that you, or anyone, know at all of the sheer existence of the thing. This is why epistemologists such as Descartes, in assessing our claims to know, have had, out of what seems to them a commitment to intellectual purity and seriousness, to consider possibilities that in various moods may seem frivolous or far-fetched, such as that they may now be dreaming that they are awake – a possibility (unless it can be ruled out, explicitly) that at a stroke would put under a cloud any claim to know the world on the basis of our senses. (The difference between dreaming and reality is one of the great philosophical junctures, or jointures, that is not a function of differences; not to be settled by noting specific marks and

Counting and Recounting

features, say predicates. It is my claim for Wittgenstein's thought that his criteria are meant not to settle the field of existence [in its disputes with dreams, imaginations, hallucinations, delusions] but to mark its bourn, say its conceptual space.) This is a long story, not to everyone's taste to pursue at length, and not to anyone's taste or profit to pursue at just any time (as Descartes is careful to say). What interests me here is to get at the intersection of the epistemologist's question of existence, say of the existence of the external world, or of what analytical philosophy calls other minds, with Leontes' perplexity about knowing whether his son is his.

Leontes' first question to his son is: "Art thou my boy?" And then he goes on to try to recognize the boy as his by their resemblance in certain marks and features, at first by comparing their noses. That speech, distracted, ends with a repetition of the earlier doubt: "Art thou my calf?" Already here we glimpse a Shakespearean pathos, a sense that one may feel mere sadness enough to fill an empty world. Upon the repetition Leontes compares their heads. These efforts are of course of no avail. Then he rules out the value of the testimony of anyone else, as if testifying that he must know for himself; and as he proceeds he insists that his doubts are reasonable, and he is led to consider his dreams. It is all virtually an exercise out of Descartes's *Meditations*. But while Descartes suggests that his doubts may class him with madmen, he succeeds (for some of his readers) in neutralizing the accusation, that is, in sufficiently establishing the reasonableness of his doubts, at least provisionally. Whereas Leontes is, while in doubt, certainly a madman. What is their difference?

What Leontes is suffering has a cure, namely to acknowledge his child as his, to own it, something every normal parent will do, or seems to do, something it is the first obligation of parents to do (though, come to think about it, most of us lack the knock-down evidence we may take ourselves to possess, in this case as in the case of owning that the world exists). Still it is enough, it is the essence of the matter, to know it for ourselves, say to acknowledge the child. The cure in Descartes's case is not so readily describable; and perhaps it is not available. I mean, acknowledging that the world exists, that you know for yourself that it is yours, is not so clear a process. Descartes's discovery of skepticism shows, you might say, what makes Leontes' madness possible, or what makes his madness representative of the human need for acknowledgment.

Disowning Knowledge

The depth of this madness, or of its possibility, is revealed by *The Winter's Tale* to measure, in turn, the depth of drama, or of spectacle, or of showing itself, in its competition with telling or narrative, because, as suggested, even after believing the truth proclaimed by an oracle Leontes is not brought back to the world (supposing he ever is) except by the drama of revelation and resurrection at the end of this work for theater; by seeing something, beyond being told something.

This is confirmed as a matter of this drama's competition with narrative romance, by making the finding of a child who has been empirically lost, in *fact* rejected and abandoned, a matter swiftly dealt with by simple narration: The gentlemen who share the telling of the story of the daughter found say it is hard to believe, but in the event (especially given their use of the convention of increasing one's credibility by saying that what one will say will sound incredible), nothing proves easier. The matter for drama, by contrast, is to investigate the finding of a wife *not* in empirical fact lost, but, let me say, transcendently lost, lost just because one is blind to her – as it were conceptually unprepared for her – because that one is blind to himself, lost to himself. Here is what becomes, at some final stage, of the great Shakespearean problematic of legitimate succession: Always seen as a matter essential to the flourishing state, recognizing (legitimizing) one's child now appears as a matter essential to individual sanity, a discovery begun perhaps in Hamlet, and developed in Lear.

We are bound, it seems to me, at some point to feel that this theater is contesting the distinction between saying and showing. If the concluding scene of this theater is telling something, it is not something antecedently known; it is rather instituting knowledge, reconceiving, reconstituting knowledge, along with the world. Then there must be a use of the concept of telling more fundamental than, or explaining or grounding, its use to tell differences; a use of the concept of telling as fundamental as seeing for oneself. That there is such a use is a way of putting the results of my work on Wittgenstein's idea of a criterion, because that idea – used to describe, in a sense to explain, how language relates (to) things – gives a sense of how things fall under our concepts, of how we individuate things and name, settle on nameables, of why we call things as we do, as questions of how we determine what *counts* as instances of our con-

Counting and Recounting

cepts, this thing as a table, that as a chair, this other as a human, that other as a god. To speak is to say what counts.

This is not the time to try to interest anyone in why the concept of counting occurs in this intellectual space, I mean to convince one unconvinced that its occurrence is not arbitrary and that it is the same concept of counting that goes with the concept of telling. (Something counts because it fits or *matters*. I think of the concept in this criterial occurrence as its nonnumerical use – it is not here tallying how much or how many, but establishing membership or belonging. This is a matter both of establishing what Wittgenstein speaks of as a kind of object, and also attributing a certain value or interest to the object.) But before moving from this region of parting to the other – that is, from the region of telling and imparting or relating and partaking, which I am calling the region of participation, to the region of departing or separation, which I am calling the region of parturition – I want to note two ways for further considering the question.

The first way is to ask whether it is chance that the concept of telling is used both to cover the progress of relating a story and to cover the progress of counting or numbering, as if counting numbers were our original for all further narration. Consider that counting by numbers contains within itself the difference between fiction and fact, since one learns both to count the numbers, that is to recite them, intransitively, and to count things, that is to relate, or coordinate, numerals and items, transitively; and counting by numbers contains the ideas that recitations have orders and weights and paces, that is, significant times and sizes of items and significant distances between them. In counting by numbers, intransitively or transitively, matters like order and size and pace of events are fixed ahead of time, whereas in telling tales it is their pleasure to work these things out as part of the telling, or as part of a mode or genre of telling – it is why what the teller of a story does is to recount, count *again* – so you needn't be making a mistake if you let lapse a space of sixteen years in your account of certain kinds of things.

The second way I note for considering the connection of counting by criteria with counting as telling (or tallying) concerns what I suppose is the major claim I make in *The Claim of Reason* about Wittgenstein's idea of a criterion, namely that while criteria provide conditions of (shared) speech they do not provide an answer to

Disowning Knowledge

skeptical doubt. I express this by saying that criteria are disappointing, taking them to express, even to begin to account for, the human disappointment with human knowledge. Now when Leontes cannot convince himself that Mamillius is his son on the basis of criteria such as their having similar noses and heads, and instead of recognizing criteria as insufficient for this knowledge, concludes that he may disown his child, not count him as his own, Leontes' punishment is that he loses the ability to count, to speak (consecutively), to account for the order and size and pace of his experiences, to tell anything. This is my initial approach to the "Is whispering nothing?" speech: Without now trying to penetrate to the meaning of that Shakespearean "nothing," trying rather to keep my head up under this onslaught of significance, I take the surface of the speech as asking whether anything counts: Does whispering count, does it matter, is it a criterion for what the world is, is anything? And in that state no one can answer him, because it is exactly the state in which you have repudiated that attunement with others in our criteria on which language depends. So I take us here to be given a portrait of the skeptic at the moment of the world's withdrawal from his grasp, to match the portrait of Othello babbling and fainting, in comparison with which the philosopher's portrait of the skeptic as not *knowing* something, in the sense of being uncertain of something, shows as an intellectualization of some prior intimation.

And Shakespeare's portrait indicates what the intimation is of, of which the philosopher's *is* the intellectualization, one in which, as I keep coming back to putting it, the failure of knowledge is a failure of acknowledgment, which means, whatever else it means, that the result of the failure is not an ignorance but an ignoring, not an opposable doubt but an unappeasable denial, a willful uncertainty that constitutes an annihilation. These formulations suggest that *The Winter's Tale* may be taken as painting the portrait of the skeptic as a fanatic. The inner connection between skepticism and fanaticism is a further discovery of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, which takes both skepticism and fanaticism as products of dialectical illusion (the one despairing over the absence of the unconditioned, the other claiming its presence), divided by perfect enmity with one another, united in their reciprocal enmities with human reason.

The Shakespearean portrait lets us see that the skeptic *wants* the annihilation that he is punished by, that it is his way of asserting

Counting and Recounting

the humanness of knowledge, since skepticism's negation of the human, its denial of satisfaction in the human (here in human conditions of knowing), is an essential feature of the human, as it were its birthright. It is the feature (call it the Christian feature) that Nietzsche wished to overcome by his *affirmations* of the human, which would, given our state, appear to us as the overcoming or surpassing of the human. I said that Leontes loses the ability to count, to tell, to recount his experiences, and now I am taking that as his point, his strategy – to turn this punishment into his victory. Before he is recovered, he *wants* not to count, not to own what is happening to him as his, wants for there to be no counting, which is to say, nothing. Why?

This takes us to that other region of parting, that of departure, separating, dividing, branching, grafting, flowering, shearing, issuing, delivering, breeding: parturition. Without partings in this region there is nothing, if nothing comes from nothing, and if something comes only from the seeds of the earth. Leontes is quite logical in wanting there to be nothing, to want there to be no separation.

The action of the play is built on a pair of literal departures, in the first half (after a short introductory scene) a departure from Sicilia, and in the second (after the introductory scene of Time's soliloquy) a departure back from Bohemia. And the Prologue, so to speak, of the play, the opening scene of Act I, is, among some other things, a recounting of the separation of Leontes and Polixenes. Against which, how are we to understand the range of Leontes', and the play's, final words?

Good Paulina

Lead us from hence, where we may leisurely
Each one demand and answer to his part
Performed in this wide gap of time since first
We were dissevered. Hastily lead away.

When were we first dissevered? Who is we? Perhaps we think first of Leontes and Hermione; but Hermione thinks first of Perdita (she does not speak to Leontes in her only speech upon reviving, but says that she "preserved / [Herself] to see the issue" [V, iii, 127–8]); and if Leontes is thinking of Polixenes when he says "first dissevered," does he mean sixteen years ago or at the time of their

Disowning Knowledge

childhoods? and if he is thinking of Perdita he must mean when he had her carried off, but we shall, perhaps, think of her delivery from her mother in prison; and perhaps we shall think of Paulina's awakening Hermione by saying "come away," speaking of life's redemption of her, and of "bequeathing to death [her] numbness," as her leaving death, departing from it, as a being born (again). As if all disseverings are invoked in each; as if to say that life no less than death is a condition and process of dissevering; as if to see that each of us "demanding and answering to our part" means seeing ourselves as apart from everything of which we are part, always already dissevered, which above all here means – and hence the idea of theater in this theater above all means – that each is part, only part, that no one is everything, that apart from this part that one has, there is never nothing, but always others. How could one fail to know this? I say that such thoughts are invoked in Leontes' concluding words, but to what extent in saying "Hastily lead away" is he, do we imagine, anxious to depart from them as well?

Let us go back to my claim that Leontes' wish for there to be nothing – the skeptic as nihilist – goes with his effort, at the cost of madness, not to count. The general idea of the connection is that counting implies multiplicity, differentiation. Then we could say that what he wants is for there to be nothing separate, hence nothing but plenitude. But he could also not just want this either, because plenitude, like nothingness, would mean the end of his (individual) existence. It may be that each of these fantasies comes to the wish never to have been born. Beyond suggesting a wish not to be natal, hence not mortal, the wish says on its face that suicide is no solution to the problem it sees. If philosophers are right who have taken the idea of never having been born as dissipating the fear of death, the idea does not dissipate the fear of dying, say annihilation. Leontes' nothingness was, as it were, to make room within plenitude for his sole existence, but it makes too much room, it lets the others in and out at the same time. So Leontes, I am taking it, wants neither to exist nor not to exist, neither for there to be a Leontes separate from Polixenes and Hermione and Mamillius nor for there not to be, neither for Polixenes to depart nor for him not to.

It is out of this dilemma that I understand Leontes to have come upon a more specific matter not to count. What specifically he does not want to count is the other face of what he does not want to own, the time of breeding, the fact of life that time is a father, that

Counting and Recounting

it has issue, even, as Time, the Chorus, says in this play, that it "brings forth" its issue, which suggests that time may also be, like nature, a mother. Of all the reasons there may be not to wish to count time, what is Leontes' reason?

The last word of the Prologue is the word "one" (in that context a pronoun for "son"); and the opening word of the play proper, as it were, is "nine." It is the term of Hermione's pregnancy, which, as I suppose is by now predictable, I am taking as the dominating fact of the play. Let us have that opening speech of Polixenes' before us.

Nine changes of the wat'ry star hath been
The shepherd's note since we have left our throne
Without a burden: time as long again
Would be filled up, my brother, with our thanks,
And yet we should for perpetuity
Go hence in debt. And therefore, like a cipher,
Yet standing in rich place, I multiply
With one "We thank you," many thousands more
That go before it.

(I, ii, 1-9)

(For fun I note that it is a speech of nine lines, the last not (yet) complete, and that of Polixenes' seven speeches before he accedes to the command to stay, all but one are either nine lines or one line long.) Polixenes' opening speech speaks Leontes' mind, it contains everything Leontes' mind needs (which now means to me, since a working mind, a mind still in command of language, a mind that cannot simply not count), everything it needs to miscount, or discount, to misattribute, the thing it finds to be unbearable to count: The speech has the figure nine as the term at once of pregnancy and of Polixenes' sojourn in Sicilia; it has the contrast between being absent or empty (his throne without a burden) and being present and filled up ("standing in rich place," and especially *time* as filled up, about to issue in something); and it has the idea of nothing as breeding, that is, of a cipher multiplying, being fruitful, the Shakespearean nothing – as noting, as cipher, as naughtiness, as origin – from which everything comes (as Lear, for example, to his confusion, learned).

I observe in passing that the clause "like a cipher / Yet standing

Disowning Knowledge

in rich place, I multiply” is a latent picture of sexual intercourse, by which I mean that it need not become explicit but lies in wait for a mind in a certain frame, as Leontes’ is, the frame of mind in which the earth is seen as, or under the dominance of, in Leontes’ phrase, a “bawdy planet.” He uses the phrase later in the scene when he concludes “No barricado for a belly. Know’t / It will let in and out the enemy, / With bag and baggage” (I, ii, 204–6), another latent fantasy of intercourse and ejaculation. The vision of our planet as bawdy is shared by Hamlet and Lear as a function of their disgust with it, and it is an instance of the way in which the world, in a phrase of Emerson’s, is asked to wear our color: Leontes’ vision of the world sexualized is a possibility realized in *Antony and Cleopatra*, confronting in that play the vision of the world politicized, where those worlds intersect or become one another; in *The Winter’s Tale* the intersection of sexualization is with the world, I would say, economicized.

In Polixenes’ opening speech, economicization is expressed in the idea of his multiplying, which in that context means both that he is breeding and that numbers and words in general, like great nature and time, are breeding out of control; and it is expressed in that phrase he uses about filling up another nine months, making time pregnant with thanks, namely that he would still “for perpetuity / Go hence in debt.” The ensuing computation by multiplication (adding an inseminating cipher) is meant not to overcome but to note the debt. What the unpayable debt is is sketched in the opening scene, the Prologue. In this civilized, humorous exchange between courtiers representing each of the two kings, each expresses his own king’s wish to pay back something owed the other. The debt is discussed as a visiting and a receiving, but in the central speech of the scene Camillo describes the issue between the kings as one in which an affection rooted between them in their childhoods has branched, that is continued but divided. “Since their more mature dignities and royal necessities made separation of their society, their encounters though not personal, have been royally attorneyed with interchange of gifts, letters, loving embassies; that they have seemed to be together, though absent; shook hands as over a vast.” In the ensuing play the vast opens, and the debt seems to be for the fact of separation itself, for having one’s own life, one’s own hands, for there being or there having to be substitutes for the personal, for the fact that visits are necessary, or possible; a debt owed, one might

Counting and Recounting

say, for the condition of indebtedness, relatedness, as such, payment of which could only increase it, have further issue.

So we already have sketched for us here an answer to the question why a play about the overcoming of revenge is a play of computation and economic exchange: The literal, that is economic, ideas of paying back and of getting even allow us to see and formulate what revenge Leontes requires and why the revenge he imagines necessary for his rest only increases the necessity for it; and it suggests the transformations required if revenge is to be replaced by justice. Leontes wishes an evenness, or annihilation of debt, of owing, which would take place in a world without counting, apart from any evaluation of things, or commensuration of them, for example, any measuring of visits, of gifts, of exchanges, as of money for things, or punishments for offenses, or sisters or daughters for wives. Payment in such a case would do the reverse of what he wants, it would increase what he wishes to cease; it would imply the concept of indebtedness, hence of otherness. And this sense of the unpayable, the unforgivability of one's owing, as it were for being the one one is, for so to speak the gift of life, produces a wish to revenge oneself upon existence, on the fact, or facts, of life as such.

Nietzsche spotted us as taking revenge on Time, Time and its "It was," as if we are locked in a death struggle with nostalgia. Leontes seems rather to want revenge on Time and its "It will be," not because of its threat of mutability, bringing change to present happiness, but for something like the reverse reason, that its change perpetuates the nightmare of the present, its changes, its issuing, the very fact of more time. This may mean that Leontes' case is hopeless, whereas Nietzsche is led to a proposal for reconceiving time; but then this also meant reconceiving human existence. Nietzsche's formulations will have helped produce some of mine; but a more interesting matter would be to understand what helped produce some of his – doubtless his work on tragedy went into it. This leaves open the question of the relation of telling and retaliation, the question whether narration as such¹ is being proposed as the offspring of revenge, that it is out of revenge for the fact of issuing and unpayable indebtedness that words breed into tales in which evenness is sought, in which recounting, counting again, is imperative, either as retribution or as the overcoming of retribution we know as forgiveness and love.

Disowning Knowledge

The opening scene proper of *The Winter's Tale* raises the question why Polixenes, after a visit of nine months, chooses now to leave; it alerts us to consider that Polixenes gives no good answer to this question. He expresses a fear of what, in his absence, may "breed" (I, ii, 12); and when Hermione says that if he'll "tell he longs to see his son" she'll not only let him go but "thwack him hence with distaffs" – that is, to attend to his brood is a reason any woman will respect – but he does not claim this. Furthermore, the victory of her argument comes with saying that, since he offers no reason, as if leaving something unsaid, she'll be forced to keep him "as prisoner, / Not like a guest." When in the next act she is reported, in prison, to receive comfort from her babe, what she is reported saying is "My poor prisoner, / I am innocent as you" (II, ii, 27–8). And Polixenes gives in to her with the words "Your guest, then, madam: / To be your prisoner should import offending" (I, ii, 54–5). Take this as something Leontes hears, or knows for himself, almost says for himself in his identification with Polixenes. The offense for *him* in being her prisoner, her child, would be a matter of *horror*, if she were having *his* child. His logic again, in denying this consequence, is therefore impeccable. (This is not the only time, in noting Leontes' identification with Polixenes, that I allude to the psychic complexities this poses for Leontes. For a further example, if Polixenes is his brother, hence Hermione Polixenes' sister, then imagining that they are adulterous is imagining them incestuous as well. If you take Leontes either as horrified or as jealous of that, hence either as denying or craving it, then the implication is that he feels *himself* on that ground to be the illegitimate and incestuous brother. This idea would be helped, perhaps signaled, by the emphatic lack of mention in the present situation of Polixenes' own wife.)

I am still asking why Polixenes has decided to part now. To the evidence I have been marshaling from his opening speech concerning breeding and time's being filled up and his multiplying and later his not being a prisoner, I add the repeated explanation with which he ends each of his succeeding two substantial speeches: "Besides, I have stayed / To tire your royalty" (I, ii, 14–5) and "My stay [is] . . . a charge and trouble" (I, ii, 25–6). Taken as pro forma, civilized excuses these must receive pro forma, civilized denials from his hosts; and for a long time it seemed to me that he was saying just

Counting and Recounting

the thing that would prompt them to urge him civilly to stay. Then the urging gets out of hand, and the leaving becomes no less suspicious than the urging. My better suggestion is by now clear enough, and is contained in Polixenes' word "nine."

He is departing because Hermione's filling up and approaching term seems to him to leave no more room and time for him in Sicilia. It is this, the implication of the fact of her pregnancy, that Polixenes' speech leaves unsaid; and it is this that Leontes in turn undertakes to deny, for, it seems to me, all kinds of reasons. First, out of his love for Polixenes, to reassure him; again, because he feels the same way, that his room and time are being used up by Hermione's plenitude; again, with the very intensifying of his identification with Polixenes, the wish or push to exit, to depart, feels to him like abandonment, as does the imminent issuing, or exiting, or dissevering, of Hermione.

I regard it as a recommendation of this way of looking at the opening of the play that it does not choose between Leontes' love and loss of status as between Polixenes and Hermione, and that it does not deny the sexual implication of the number nine that Shakespeare's telling carefully sets up in coordinating the beginning of Polixenes' visit with Hermione's conceiving. However fantastic it seems of Leontes to imagine that the first thing that happened upon Polixenes' arrival on his shores is that he impregnated his wife, it is not fantastic for him to relate that arrival to an access of his own desire. Another recommendation of this way of taking things is that it does not require a choice between locating the onset of Leontes' jealousy as occurring only with the aside "Too hot, too hot" at the 108th line of the scene and as having been brought on the stage with him. This is now a matter of a given performance, of determining how you wish to conceive of Leontes' arrival at the conjunction of the events in Polixenes' opening speech: He wouldn't have to hear them from Polixenes, for what Polixenes knows is not news for him. What matters is the conjunction itself, the precipitousness of it. Taking the jealousy as derivative of the sense of revenge upon life, upon its issuing, or separating, or replication, I am taking it as, so to speak, the solution of a problem in computation or economy, one that at a stroke solves a chain of equations, in which sons and brothers are lovers, and lovers are fathers and sons, and wives and mothers become one another. Precipitousness

Disowning Knowledge

I have also taken as an essential feature of the onset of skeptical doubt, which is a principal cause in my taking Othello's treatment of Desdemona as an allegory of the skeptic's view and treatment of the world. It is a place within which to investigate psychic violence, or torture, as a function both of skepticism's annihilation of the world and of the wounded intellect's efforts to annihilate skepticism.

Still at the beginning of Shakespeare's play, it is nearing time to call a halt. I must reach its closing scene, since that will present this play's vision of a path of recovery, the quest for which is, as I claimed earlier, imposed by the nature of skepticism itself. To prepare what I have to say about this vision of recovery, and as if in earnest of the intention one day to get further into the second part of the play, the Bohemian part, that which after all makes a romance out of a tragedy, I shall pick out two elements of that part that I shall need for a description of the final events – the elements of Autolycus and of the fabulous bear.

In the figure of Autolycus the play's preoccupations with deviousness (both in money and in words – his father or grandfather was Hermes) and lawlessness and economy and sexuality and fertility and art are shown to live together with jollity, not fatality. They are together in his early line, "My traffic is sheets" (IV, iii, 23), meaning that his business is stealing and bawdry; that he sells ballads and broadsheets; that he sells ballads about, let us say, birds that steal sheets; that he steals the ballads from which he makes a living; and that these exchanges have something to do with the providing of sexual satisfaction – all of which it seems reasonable to suppose that Shakespeare would be glad to say of his own art. I emphasize Autolycus as an artist figure, in balance with the solemnity of the Giulio Romano artistry at the play's close, as one of the contributions Bohemia makes to Sicilia, its recounting of existence. It is in Autolycus that, in this play of the play between art and nature, between artifice and issue, we see that the sheepshearing festival is also a business enterprise; it is not in itself, as one might have thought the recovery from skepticism, or civilization; it celebrates the progress of nature no more than the exchange of money and custom, like the play to which it lends its great image. Then Clown enters to Autolycus (it is our first view of him after his going off to perform the "good deed" of burying the remains of the bear's dinner of Antigonous) as follows:

Counting and Recounting

Let me see, every 'leven wether tods, every tod yields pound
and odd shilling; fifteen hundred shorn, what comes the wool
to? . . . I cannot do't without counters. Let me see, what am
I to buy for our sheep-shearing feast?

(IV, ii, 32-7)

The Clown's painful calculation reminds us that all the arithmetical operations – not alone multiplying, but dividing, adding, and subtracting – are figures for breeding, or for its reciprocal, dying. If Thoreau had asked the question, What comes the wool to? I am sure he would at the same time have been asking, What does wool mean? what does it matter? what does it count for? – as if to declare that this piece of nature's issue is itself money and that the process of determining meaning is a process of counting; as if the fullness of language shown in figuration has as sound a basis as the issuing of language demonstrated in figuring. (I mention as a curiosity that the idea of shearing or pruning, as well as that of summing up or reckoning, is contained in the idea of computing.)

One of Autolycus's ballads he claims to have gotten from a midwife named Mistress Taleporter, evidently a carrier of tales, about "how a usurer's wife was brought to bed of twenty money-bags at a burden" (IV, iv, 263-5). It is agreed that Autolycus is mocking contemporary ballads about monstrous births, and I hope it will equally be agreed that this, while filling the play up with ideas of money as breeding, hence of art and nature as creating one another, is mocking Leontes' idea that birth is as such monstrous; it seeks perspective on the idea. Further perspective is sought in the following scene, of the sheepshearing itself, in the notorious debate between Perdita and Polixenes concerning bastards, which expresses the halves of Leontes' mind: Perdita, like her conventional natural father, who called her a bastard and shunned her, wants to shun bastards; Polixenes, in denying a flat distinction between nature and nature's mending art, benignly concludes that all graftings are legitimate, as legitimate as nature; typically, he has thus shown a possibility from which Leontes draws a malignant conclusion, here that no birth is legitimate, that the world *is* of bastards, to be shunned and cast adrift.

This brings me to the bear, in whom nature seems to be reabsorbing a guilty civilization. His dining on the roaring gentleman, mocking him, is carefully coordinated in the Clown's report with

Disowning Knowledge

the raging, mocking storm, which is seen as having "swallowed" or "flapdragoned" the roaring souls on the ship. But if the bear is nature's initial response to Leontes' denials of it, is there a suggestion that the denial of nature is also nature's work? I take it the play concludes (explicitly, at any rate) not, or not always, that in its citing of "an art / Which does mend Nature, change it rather; but / The art itself is Nature" (IV, iv, 95-6), the implication is that there is also an art that does not mend nature, but that instead changes it into something else, unnatural, or, say, lawful, or rather social, an art not born of nature but, hence, of the human or of something beyond.

This is one of the arguments of which the final scene is a function, summarized in Leontes' cry:

Oh, she's warm!
If this be magic, let it be an art
Lawful as eating.

(V, iii, 109-11)

In proposing that there is a lawful as well as an unlawful magic, which perhaps comes to the idea that religion is lawful magic (thus reversing an older idea), Leontes' words suggest that there is an unlawful as well as a lawful eating. A play like *Coriolanus* a few years earlier was in part built from the idea there is an unlawful, or prelawful, eating, a cannibalism, that Shakespeare names elsewhere as well as the relation of parents to children. (*Coriolanus*, on my view, goes so far as to suggest that there is even a lawful cannibalism, one necessary, at any rate, to the formation of the lawful, that is, to the social.) I note again that *The Winter's Tale* similarly presents lawful and unlawful versions of its ramifying idea of "paying back," with which the first two scenes of Act I and the first and last scenes of Act V open, revenge being the unlawful version of which justice would be the lawful. I propose taking the final scene as, among other things, a marriage ceremony. This means taking Paulina's warning to her audience that hers may seem unlawful business and her invitation to them to leave, as a statement that she is ratifying a marriage that can seem unlawful, where the only unlawfulness in question there would seem to be some forbidden degree of consanguinity. In Polixenes' statement to Perdita,

Counting and Recounting

You see, sweet maid, we marry
A gentler scion to the wildest stock,
And make conceive a bark of baser kind
By bud of nobler race.

(IV, iv, 92-5)

(which names the convention of grafting as what marriage is, marriage of different stocks and buds), marriage is located as the art, the human invention, which changes nature, which gives birth to legitimacy, lawfulness. No wonder Shakespeare's investigation of marriage has no end.

Since I am not dealing very consecutively with the Shakespearean problematic of incestuousness, which haunts this play; and since I propose no theory of incest – wanting rather to keep the events of the play at the level of data for which any such theory would wish to account – let me register my sense here that we can hardly these days avoid the thought that a play in which the line between nature and law is blurred and questioned is a play preoccupied with incestuousness, taking the incest taboo, with Freud and Lévi-Strauss, as that event which creates the social out of natural bondings. A reason for me not to hurry into this area is that this role attributed to the incest taboo is, in traditional philosophy, attributed, if ambiguously, to the social contract, which may help to explain why the existence of this contract and the new bonds it is said to have created have been the subject of confusion and joking in the history of political theory. It suggests itself that the tyranny of kings, from which the contract was to free us, was itself an expression or projection of something beyond divine right, namely that we require divorce from a contract already in effect, a kind of marriage bond; divorce from the tyranny of the parental or, say, the romance of the familial, a subjugation not by force but by love. Leontes was mad, but the problem he had fallen prey to is real, and remains without a perfect solution.

I said that the bear dining on the gentleman is the play's image of lawful eating, for as the Clown observes, "They [viz., bears] are never curst [i.e., bad-tempered (Arden ed.) or vicious (Signet ed.)] but when they are hungry" (III, iii, 129-30), so that, unlike mankind, things of nature are not insatiable. This is why this dinner can carry comically, why its expression of nature's violence seems the be-

Disowning Knowledge

ginning of redemption, or rescue, from the shipwreck of human violence, with its unpayable debts. Near the end of the chapter entitled "Spring," just before the concluding chapter of *Walden*, Thoreau paints the violence of nature in sentences like the following:

We need to witness our own limits transgressed, and some life pasturing freely where we never wander. We are cheered when we observe the vulture feeding on the carrion which disgusts and disheartens us and deriving health and strength from the repast. . . . I love to see that Nature is so rife with life that myriads can be afforded to be sacrificed, suffered to prey on one another. . . . The impression made on a wise man is that of universal innocence.

In having already described the final scene as a study of theater and proposed it as a wedding ceremony, I am, it will be clear, not satisfied to think of it – as was once more familiar – as a translated moment of religious resurrection, with Paulina a figure for St. Paul, a figure justified by the appearance in the scene of the words "grace," "graces," "faith," and "redeems." It is, however, equally clear to me that an understanding of the scene will have to find its place for this translation. I look for it in a sense of this theater as in competition with religion, as if declaring itself religion's successor. It may be that I am too influenced here by some things I have said about *Coriolanus*, but it strikes me that the reason a reader like Santayana claimed to find everything in Shakespeare but religion was that religion is Shakespeare's pervasive, hence invisible, business. The resurrection of the woman is, theatrically, a claim that the composer of this play is in command of an art that brings words to life, or vice versa, and since the condition of this life is that her spectators awake their faith, we, as well as Leontes, awake, as it were, with her. A transformation is being asked of our conception of the audience of a play, perhaps a claim that we are no longer spectators, but something else, more, say participants. But participants in what? Who is this woman, and on what terms is she brought to life?

She says she preserved herself "to see the issue" (V, iii, 128), meaning the issue of the oracle that gave hope Perdita was in being, and meaning Perdita as her issue, her daughter, to whom alone, as said, she speaks (except for the gods) as she returns to life. Does

Counting and Recounting

this mean that she does *not* forgive Leontes? Perdita is equally his issue, and does the odd naming of her as "the issue" accept or reject this? Perdita found is equally the issue of this *play*, called *The Winter's Tale*, as is Hermione awakened. Beyond this, in a general scene of issuing, of delivery, I find myself feeling in Hermione's awakening that the play itself is being brought forth, as from itself, that she *is* the play, something I first felt about Cleopatra and her play, in which her final nested acts of theater are also the staging of a wedding ceremony. Who knows what marriage is, or what a wedding ceremony should look like, after Luther and Henry the Eighth have done their work? And if we are created with Hermione, then we are equally, as an audience, her, and the play's, issue.

Paulina (with her echoing of St. Paul, the expounder both of marriage and of salvation by faith alone) I take as the muse of this ceremony, or stage director; she knows the facts; it is Leontes' faith that is at stake. And the ceremony takes place at his bidding and under his authority:

PAULINA. Those that think it is unlawful business
I am about, let them depart.

LEONTES. Proceed.
No foot shall stir.

(V, iii, 96-8)

So we, the eventual audience, are here under his authority as well. What happens from now on is also his issue; it is his production. To see what happens to this scene conceived as his creation, and the culmination of his creatings, I put this together with two other authorial moments of his in the early scenes in Sicilia. First with his aside upon sending off Hermione and Polixenes to dispose themselves according to their own bents:

I am angling now,
Though you perceive not how I give line.
(I, ii, 180-1)

Taken as an author's revelation to his audience, he is cautioning us that what we do not perceive in his lines will work to betray ourselves. And I put his authority – compromised as authority is shown to be – together also with my seeing him as interrupting his son's

Disowning Knowledge

tale of generation, another authorial self-identification. Leontes has found the voice in which to complete it, as it were a son's voice, as if he is accepting in himself the voices of father and son, commanding and whispering, hence multiplicity, accepting himself as having, and being, issue. What is the issue?

I have said that not alone the play is the issue of the tale of romance, as from a source, but Hermione as the play. Can Hermione be understood as Leontes' issue? But this is the sense – is it not? – of the passage from Genesis in which theology has taken marriage to be legitimized, in which the origin of marriage is presented as the creation of the woman from the man. It is how they are one flesh. Then let us emphasize that this ceremony of union takes the form of a ceremony of separation, thus declaring that the question of two becoming one is just half the problem; the other half is how one becomes two. It is separation that Leontes' participation in parturition grants – that Hermione has, that there is, a life beyond his, and that she can create a life beyond his and hers, and beyond plenitude and nothingness. The final scene of *The Winter's Tale* interprets this creation as their creation by one another. Each awakens, each was stone, it remains unknown who stirs first, who makes the first move back. The first move of revenge it seems easy to determine; the first move to set aside revenge, impossible. Some good readers of this play who would like to believe in it further than they find they can, declare themselves unconvinced that this final scene "works" (as it is typically put). But I take some mode of uncertainty just here to be in the logic of the scene, as essential to its metaphysics as to the working of its theater. Its working is no more the cause of our conviction, or participation, than it is their result; and our capacity for participation is precisely a way of characterizing the method no less than the subject of this piece of theater.

Does the closing scene constitute forgiveness, Hermione's forgiveness of Leontes? At the beginning of Act V Leontes was advised by one of his faithful lords that he has "redeemed," "paid" more penitence than done trespass, and that he should "Do as the heavens have done, forget your evil; / With them, forgive yourself." This mysterious advice implies that to be forgiven you must allow yourself to be forgiven, accept forgiveness. Has Leontes accomplished this? It seems to be the form in which the revenge against life (as Nietzsche almost said), the weddedness to nothingness, is forgone, forgotten. The romantics saw this revenge, as for example in *The*

Counting and Recounting

Ancient Mariner, as our carrying the death of the world in us, in our constructions of it.¹ The final scene of issuing in *The Winter's Tale* shows what it may be to find in oneself the life of the world.

Is the life of the world, supposing the world survives, a big responsibility? Its burden is not its size but its specificness. It is no bigger a burden than the responsibility for what Emerson and Thoreau might call the life of our words. We might think of the burden as holding, as it were, the mirror up to nature. Why assume just that Hamlet's picture urges us players to imitate, that is, copy or reproduce, (human) nature? His concern over those who "imitated humanity so abominably" is not alone that we not imitate human beings badly, but that we not become imitation members of the human species, abominations; as if to imitate, or represent – that is, to participate in – the species well is a condition of being human. Such is Shakespearean theater's stake in the acting, or playing, of humans: Then Hamlet's picture of the mirror held up to nature asks us to see if the mirror as it were clouds, to determine whether nature is breathing (still, again) – asks us to be things affected by the question.

¹This idea, in conjunction with Coleridge and others, is the topic of my essay "In Quest of the Ordinary," in *Romanticism and Contemporary Criticism*, ed. M. Eaves and M. Fischer (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1986).